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# FROM SLAVERY TO SONG

THE PASSOVER STORY

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Abraham H. Berman

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THE PASSOVER STORY

BY

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# FROM SLAVERY TO SONG

## I. ISRAEL IN EGYPT

One of the most sacred festivals observed by the Jews is Pesach, as it is called in Hebrew, or Passover, in English. It is also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It begins in the Jewish calendar on the eve of the fifteenth day of Nissan and lasts, according to the Bible, seven days. Orthodox Jews celebrate one day longer. Pesach falls in our usual calendar about the end of March or the first two weeks of April. It comes with the beginning of spring and is frequently called the spring festival. It is observed with beautiful home ceremonies. In every true Jewish household will be found Matzah, unleavened bread. Food or drink that is not unleavened may not be used during the festival. On the first and last days there is impressive public worship in the synagogue or temple. The Jew who has lost interest in Pesach has lost proper interest in his religion, or is ignorant of it. Pesach stands for one of the grandest, most inspiring teachings of the Jewish religion. To be acquainted with it is to admire it. Its message also pertains to the non-Jew.

Why is Pesach celebrated? The answer to this question gives one of the most instructive and at the same time dramatic stories of the Bible, or of any other book. It would be a thrilling subject for the stage. It is called the Exodus, which means the going out. The second book of the Bible has received its name, Exodus, from the story. To tell this story properly one must start with Joseph, one of the noblest characters that ever lived. Every boy ought to know his career by heart. It is an inspiration.

Now take your Bible and read from the thirty-seventh chapter of Genesis. You will find that Joseph was jealously hated by his unbrotherly brothers. They made up their minds to get rid of him. They did so with the first opportunity by selling him to some men who went to Egypt and there disposed of him. After a time and some very hard experiences Joseph became the highest officer of the Egyptian King who was called Pharaoh. There was a terrible famine throughout Egypt and neighboring countries. Before the coming of the famine, which God had made known to Joseph, Egypt had at Joseph's advice stored up great quantities of all kinds of food. During the famine people came from all directions to Egypt to buy food. Joseph's brothers came also from Palestine, where their aged father, Jacob, still lived. After a time Joseph and his brothers became known to each other and reconciled through his forgiving kindness. He urged them to go back and bring their father, with all his possessions, to live in Egypt. Jacob came in great joy with his sons and their families, in all seventy people, the Bible tells us. They settled in a portion of Egypt called Goshen, which Pharaoh conceded to them. Here they continued to live. Their children married and had families. This continued to go on for several hundred years. Jacob in time died, and so did Joseph. The people went on increasing in number till in time they grew from the seventy who had come to Egypt with Jacob to hundreds of thousands.

We must now go to the second book of the Bible, Exodus, to follow the story. We are told there, beginning with chapter one, that there came to the throne of Egypt a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph. Of course he did not know Joseph personally; Joseph had been dead a great many years. But he certainly knew of Joseph. He certainly knew of Joseph's greatness and helpfulness to Egypt. Joseph had really saved Egypt from starvation. This could surely not be forgotten,



But the Bible tells us of this particular Pharaoh, that he did not know Joseph. What the Bible means to tell us is that the Pharaoh did not wish to know Joseph. This Egyptian king was like a great many people to-day. They are ungrateful. They enjoy the benefits of great favors and then ignore or pretend not to know those from whom the kindnesses came. But ingratitude is dangerous, it always hurts the guilty one more than the one to whom he is ungrateful. God has made us so wonderfully that we cannot do anything, either good or evil, without leaving a mark or impression of it within ourselves. If you exercise yourself you become stronger. If you do right you become better. If you do wrong you become worse. You grow in happiness as you grow in goodness. You feel mean and unhappy as you increase in wickedness. Pharaoh and his people had, in time, to pay dearly for his ingratitude.

When Pharaoh saw the great increase of the Israelites he became alarmed. He feared that they might, in time, become so numerous as to be dangerous in case of war by taking side with the enemy. We cannot blame Pharaoh for considering and looking out for the welfare of his country, but the way in which he tried to bring it about cannot be defended. He loved his country well, but not wisely. He intended to be a good patriot, but was a bad man. If your character is bad your doings will be bad. A bad man cannot be a good patriot. True patriotism is a form of the highest goodness. It means purity, unselfishness, and love of the good and true. We shall see that Pharaoh was not such a man and therefore not what we should call a genuine patriot. In the end he did his country more harm than good.

Forgetting what Joseph had done for Egypt, or ungratefully disregarding what was due Joseph's people, Pharaoh cruelly determined to keep them from increasing by making slaves of them. He had taskmasters appointed and compelled the Israelites to do work that

was enough to crush the life out of them. They had to build walls of defense about cities. They had to erect great stone and brick structures for the safe-keeping of different kinds of grain and other valuable possessions of the king. Some of the pyramids, which are still among the wonders of the world, were probably built with the assistance of Jewish slaves. They had to dig canals to lead water from the Nile to parts of the country where water was scarce. In places where the river-bank was high, water had to be pumped from the stream to a canal. All this was killing work. It had to be done under a burning sun that often blistered the bare backs of the workmen. It had to be done for nothing because they were slaves. They were punished severely at times by their cruel overseers when, through weakness or other good reason, they did not do their work well. Such cruelty was the outcome of the kind of patriotism that was Pharaoh's.

And yet Pharaoh did not succeed with his intention. He wanted to crush the people and keep them weak and few. Instead of this, we are told that the people grew more numerous and strong. This seems strange, doesn't it? It will cease to seem strange if we bear in mind the old truth that is always new, that man proposes but God disposes. It is useless for us to work against God's will. No matter how wise or wealthy or prominent we are, we cannot do away with God. In the end His will, not ours, must be done. Long before the time of this Pharaoh, God had promised to take care of the Israelites that they might receive and spread His teachings to the world. Pharaoh didn't know this, or if he did he paid no attention to it. Like all Pharaohs, he probably thought that there was no greater power than himself. So he made up his mind to take some other step to reduce the number and strength of Israel. This is what he did.

He sent for the Hebrew nurses who attended the Hebrew children. He commanded that when Hebrew

boys were born the nurses should put them to death. This would have been a good way to lessen and weaken the Israelites had it been followed, but it wasn't. Pharaoh learned to his surprise that the nurses did not carry out his orders. This seems astonishing. It was a bold thing for weak nurses to disobey a powerful monarch. It might have cost them their lives at once. We shall, however, cease to wonder if we know what encouraged them to do as they did. The Bible tells us that they feared God. This explains their conduct. God is the King of kings. He is the world's highest power. Whoever fears Him will fear no other being. Whoever fears Him will do no wrong. The Bible gives us a beautiful illustration of this in the life of Joseph. Joseph was asked one day by the wicked wife of his master to do her a favor. It was a terrible wrong. If he consented he might have gained a valuable friend. If he refused he would surely gain a dangerous enemy. What was he to do? He was a strange, friendless young man far from home. He had no one to advise him. But he had his conscience. His conscience told him that if he consented he would sin against God. This was sufficient to tell him what he should do. So he refused. He said (Genesis xxxviii: 9): How can I do this great wrong and sin against God? The Hebrew nurses thought likewise of Pharaoh's cruel command. They also refused. They were heroic women. They were what some people would call only nurses. They were certainly not much thought of in comparison with Pharaoh. They were humble people. He was honored as a mighty king and worshipped as a god. And yet how much greater and grander than he were those humble nurses. He was only great in position; they were great in principle. Others may get our position for us, we need not be great for that. Kings are sometimes mean, ignorant, or even idiotic and still are kings. But character is something that we must gain by ourselves. The nurses of whom we are



speaking had developed fine principles. They were queenly women although they were in a humble place. The Pharaoh was upon the throne and yet he was an unkingly man. Would you be great, grand, heroic? Get character. Would you get character? Then, like Joseph and those Hebrew nurses in Egypt, fear God.

Fear of God is the beginning of character. True character is true heroism.

We might have expected that Pharaoh would punish the disobedience of the nurses. It must certainly have angered him to be opposed and thwarted by those whom he considered as only servants and slaves. But he did nothing. We are even told that they prospered. No wonder! God was on their side. The Bible tells us that God dealt kindly with them. Keep God with you, and the most powerful earthly king can do you no real harm. He may take away your health, and imprison or hurt your body, but he cannot harm *you*. Only you, no other, can do that. Have a clear happy conscience and you have earth's greatest blessing and reward of which no one can deprive you. This great joy was certainly the possession of the brave God-fearing Hebrew nurses. May their memory be for our inspiration and emulation.

Pharaoh was still determined to carry out his murderous purpose. He became even more cruel. He noticed that the Israelites continued to increase, so he commanded all his people to put to death every Hebrew boy that might be born. This was indeed a grievous state of affairs. It was outrageous cruelty. First, unfortunate Israel suffered bitter slavery; now they were to bear the even greater grief of the murder of their new-born boys. It was enough to cause them to despair and even to doubt that there was a God at all. Meantime the Pharaoh died, leaving their condition as it was. The darkness of their sorrow must have seemed blacker. But their night was passing although they knew it not. A star of hope would soon shine for them. They were as we sometimes



are. We are in deep dark trouble and think that God has forsaken us or that He does not exist. Some of us even go so far as to think or even say unkind things of Him. But God still remains our loving Father. He may not help us as quickly as we think He should, but He is wiser than we and knows better what and when is best. When He appears farthest He is often very near. So it was with enslaved Israel. They were suffering cruel, unjust bondage. They sighed and cried with pain. Here was a wrong that had to be righted. And so the Bible tells us that the cry of Israel came up to God, and He heard. God was touched for their condition. He also remembered the promise He had made to their fore-fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to protect their people after them. So God determined to send relief. It was done in a wonderful way. It is a thrilling tale. It impresses the truth so familiar in the Bible that, as the Psalmist expressed it (ix:10): God will be a high tower of protection for the oppressed, a high tower in times of trouble. Or as another Psalm has taught it (xxxiv:23): None of them that take refuge in Him shall be desolate.

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MOSES HIDDEN IN THE REEDS

## II. THE LEADER OF THE EXODUS

Let us first hear of the great man through whom God saved Israel from their dreadful Egyptian bondage. It is a story rich in interest instruction and inspiration.

When Pharaoh commanded that all boy babies born should be cast into the river Nile there was one mother, Jochebed by name, the wife of Amram, who seems to have been more tender courageous and determined than the rest. When a baby boy came to her she tried to keep him. She kept him hid for three months. She then found that it was very dangerous and hopeless to try to hide him any longer. She had to give him up as all other mothers had to do. But she schemed to the very last moment to try to save him from drowning if she could. Instead of casting him into the water as the others did she prepared for him a little boat-like box made of the bulrushes of reeds that grew by the river bank. She daubed this within and without with pitch and clay so as to make it water-tight. I imagine that she lined it with soft grasses and leaves and maybe soft moss and tender flowers to make it as sweet and cozy a little nest as she could. Into this little ark she placed her boy. I have no doubt that you can easily imagine how she felt and how she looked as she fondly placed him in his little bed of flowers and kissed him a last good-bye. I am sure that in that moment God, who hears all things, even our unwhispered prayers, heard a mother's heart praying for God's protection of her child. Jochebed then took the little ark, placed it in the water among the reeds where it floated, and then hurried away. Like a true mother she had not the heart to stand and see when death came to her child. Our mothers try to give us all the pleasure and joy they can. There is no greater pain



or sorrow for them than when we suffer or die. Jochebed thought that the hour of her child's death had come, she could not bear the sight and hasted away.

Jochebed had a daughter Miriam. She was a young girl at the time. When her baby brother was taken to the Nile to be left there she went with her mother. When her mother laid the little ark with its precious contents in the water and hurried away Miriam remained standing at a distance to see what would happen. I do not know whether she watched because of great love and fear for her brother or merely out of curiosity, as many young sisters would do. I think that the most likely reason is that God gave her the thought to do as she did. That little babe needed special watching and care. He was in time to be the leader of his people from their bondage. He was to become one of the great men of the world. God knew this. He was guiding the happenings which were to set Israel free. Miriam and all the others did not know this. They probably found it out later. God always thus leads us. He leads us and oftentimes we do not know it. He leads us even when we sometimes seek and cannot find His presence. How careful we ought to be of ourselves! We cannot say but that one or more of us may like Miriam be used by God for some grand purpose to be realized later on.

While Miriam stood watching the fate of the precious little ark, the princess, the daughter of Pharaoh, came down to the river to bathe. She noticed the little floating box and sent one of her maids to fetch it. She had it opened and beheld a crying babe! It was a beautiful child and touched her heart with pity. She knew of the cruel command of her father and said, this is one of the Hebrews' children. Miriam had come forward by this time. When she heard the remark of the princess she asked, shall I go and call a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? The princess approved of this. Miriam ran and called her mother,



the mother of the babe. I do not think that any of us can imagine the joy of Jochebed when she was told that her babe was not only not drowned but was to be given back to her for a time. The princess told her to nurse the child and care for him until he was old enough to be brought back, when she would pay her for her services. Jochebed must have smiled in her heart when the princess said that she would pay her for tending the child. The princess, of course, did not know that Jochebed was the child's mother. Jochebed took the child home and cared for him as only a mother can. I have no doubt that as soon as he was old enough to understand she spoke to him about God, about the beauty of goodness, about the cruelty of unjustly harming others, and the duty of defending the weak who are unfairly oppressed against the ill treatment of the strong. When she had kept him long enough he was returned to the princess. It was a painful moment for the mother when she gave up her boy. As she bade him good-bye she undoubtedly said a silent prayer for his welfare. She did not know that God was watching over him. She did not think that the good care and influence he had received from her was better for his future than any amount of prayer. Prayer is good and sacred, but God will reward our doing sooner and better than our praying.

The princess took the child as her son. She called him Moses. And this Moses became the great man through whom God brought about Israel's freedom! Before we come to the story of the liberation itself or the exodus as it is called, let us see how well fitted Moses was to be God's assistant in the grand work. You may be a partner with God in carrying out the great purposes of this world, but you must first be and show yourself worthy. Think of the precious opportunity that each of us may have!

When Moses reached manhood he went one day to the fields to see what was going on. He saw the Israelites



OPPRESSION OF THE ISRAELITES IN EGYPT



whom he now knew to be his brethren, toiling at their frightful bondage. While he looked he saw an Egyptian smiting one of them. It was a case of cruel strength imposing upon pitiable but unpitied weakness. Moses saw the cruelty and injustice of it. It stirred his anger to its depths and aroused his indignation. His feeling for his brethren which his tender mother had instilled into him during the years he spent with her had not left him. Still it was dangerous for him to interfere. It would mean opposition to Egypt. It might mean banishment from the ease and luxury of the palace, or even death. Moses certainly knew this. He undoubtedly thought of it. But he thought more of duty, of the voice of God speaking within him, telling him to do the right, to defend the weak, to put down the unjust at any cost. So he rose up in majestic wrath against the Egyptian and struck him to death upon the ground. There are some who cry out murder at this story; those who understand it will say with admiration, Justice!

Another day Moses went out to the fields to visit his toiling brethren. He saw two Hebrews quarreling. He could not bear to see one man treat another unfairly. He would not uphold any one that was in the wrong, but would oppose him whether he was one of his own people or not. He was a fearless lover of justice. So he rebuked the Hebrew who was in the wrong. When he did so the man naturally became very indignant. You know that when people are in the wrong they usually become angry very quickly. He boldly asked Moses: "Who made thee a judge over us? Dost thou intend to kill me as thou killedst the Egyptian?" This frightened Moses. He felt that what he had done to the Egyptian was known. Although he was right in defending the oppressed against the cruel oppressor even at the cost of putting him to death, he felt that the people would not look at it in the same way and would put him to death.

It was dangerous for Moses to remain in the country.

It would be the end of him and his usefulness. So he fled. He had to give up the rich, easy life of the palace and flee to a strange country, where he might have to bear hardship and meet hazard. He must certainly have thought of this before he interfered and slew the Egyptian. But it did not discourage and keep him from doing his duty. He was a true man. He was a great man. No great man refuses to do his duty because it is unpleasant. He will do it even at the cost of his life. Such men are the ones whom God chooses at times to carry out his purposes. Such a man you will find Moses to have been. He did his duty even at the risk of his life. He was compelled to leave all that had been dear to him and become a stranger in a strange land. He fled to a country called Midian.

A genuine man is always true. He will always be found on the side of the true and good. So it was with Moses. When he came to the land of Midian he found a well in the field where he sat down footsore and weary to rest and refresh himself. While sitting there some shepherd girls came to draw water for their flock. Soon some shepherds came also. Being impatient and unwilling to wait till the shepherdesses had finished they drove them away. This was of course tyrannical and unjust. It was another instance of the strong taking advantage of the weak. Moses saw this. It stirred his indignation. His fine sense of justice which led him to smite down the cruel Egyptian and to interfere with the quarreling Hebrews now compelled him to protect the weak and defenceless shepherd girls. He stood up and defended them and even watered their flock for them. This kindness was delightfully rewarded. It brought Moses to the attention of the father of the girls, who was the priest of Midian, a prominent man. Moses became one of his shepherds, and better still, became his son-in-law.

There is a very beautiful story of Moses' shepherd life told by the ancient Jewish teachers of the talmud to



illustrate his character. One day when he was tending the flocks he noticed a lamb straying from its companions. He went after it to drive it back. But it continued to go. The farther he followed the farther it went. At last it came wearied and thirsty to a brook where it stopped to drink. Moses came up to it and waited till it finished. Thinking that it was too tired to walk back so great a distance he picked it up and carried it on his shoulders to the flock. This was certainly beautiful tenderness. It is the spirit which has given rise to our noble societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals which owe their start in America to the leadership of a Jew. The story tells us that while Moses was bringing back the stray lamb, a voice from heaven said to him: Since thou showest such tenderness to animals thou deservest to become a leader of men.

Now this Moses, as I have already said, became Israel's leader from bondage to liberty. I have spoken of him as I have to show that he was fitted by character to occupy so great a position and gain so lofty a place in both Jewish and general history. I wanted to point out that we have to be worthy if we would have the distinction of being chosen by God to carry out His intentions. God only honors those who are an honor to themselves.

### III. THE CALL OF MOSES

Moses had shown himself worthy to lead Israel from bondage so God chose him for this noble task. God called him for the purpose at an unexpected time and in a strange way. God does not bestow honors and grand tasks upon those who go about in life looking for such distinction. God loves and prefers the humble, the people without conceit, the people who do not believe that they know more and that they are better than everybody else. Moses was a modest man. The Bible (Numbers xii:3) tells us that he was the humblest man of his time. And so God's call to be Israel's leader came to him at a time when such a thought probably had no place in his mind. He was tending his father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness, busy with the lowly duty of a shepherd. He was certainly too much occupied with the duty before him to think of other and especially greater things which need much time and thought for themselves. It is only the man who puts his whole soul into the little present duties who is fit to receive larger and grander ones. Moses was doing his shepherd's duty faithfully when God called him to undertake the larger duty of becoming the shepherd of Israel. What a great rise that was; what a distinction to be called from the leading of sheep to the leadership of men. The like of it has happened again and again. Most of the great men and women of history came from poor lowly conditions of life. The Bible gives us some striking instances. Gideon was distinguished as Israel's brave deliverer from the Midianites. We are told (Judges vi:15) that he sprang from a poor family in the tribe of Manasseh, and was the least in his father's house. David became famous in ancient Israel as king and poet. Many beautiful soul-

stirring psalms were said to have been written by him. Read them in the Bible. You will be surprised at their beauty. If you understand and appreciate them they will leave you more religious and more happy in that deep inner joy of the heart which can only be felt and not spoken. David has been famous through history for the beautiful psalms attached to his name, and will continue to be one of the most familiar and most precious names of the Bible as long as life has sorrow and smiles. In the words which David is said to have written we can find forms in which to express the gratitude of our gladness and the solace of our sorrow. Great as David was, he began life as a shepherd. He was called by Samuel from the sheepfold when he was to be anointed to be Israel's king as successor to Saul (I Samuel xvi:11-13). The prophet Elijah is one of the greatest men of the Bible. He is also one of the most heroic men in history. When we read of his doings we feel as though we were standing before a mighty fearless giant. Take up your Bible and read of him, I Kings, xviii. And yet great and important as he became, we know nothing of his earlier life. It appears to me that the Bible wishes thus to tell us that a man may in his earlier life be poor and unknown, and yet later become very great. Elijah was succeeded by the prophet Elisha. The call to this holy office in ancient Israel came to him one day while he was ploughing (I Kings, xix). God seems to show special favor to the lowly, the poor, the oppressed. The great prophet Isaiah tells us (lvii, 15) of the Almighty, that He dwells in a high and holy place, but also with those who are humble in spirit. Be proud, be conceited, put on airs, as people say, think you know it all, and you are sure not to find God or become great. The greatest men and women are generally the most modest.

We find in all history outside of the Bible that the great men and women have generally risen from lowly



places of poverty toil and trouble. When Martin Luther, one of the greatest heroes of history, was a child he had to sing in the streets for money to buy bread. Linnaeus, a great naturalist, was so poor during his schoolboy days that he had to stick folded papers into his shoes to cover the holes which he could not afford to have mended. Another great scientist, Agassiz, was so poor when getting his education that he had to copy at night from other students books which he was not able to buy. I am sure that you know of the great men of our own country, especially Lincoln, who became great although they started life from poor beginnings. So it was with Moses, who is as great as any in history. He became the Liberator of Israel and, through the laws and teachings which he received from God, a teacher of the whole civilized world. And yet his first position in life was only that of a shepherd. What an encouragement this ought to be to those of us who are poor or have little opportunity. Let us but try to do the best we can and make the best of what we have, and success is certain to be ours. Men may not think that we are successful, but God will. He values us according to our intention and effort. As long as we feel that we have His approval, what need we care about men? On the other hand, the thought of Moses and other great men and women who have risen from poverty to prominence ought to put those of us to shame who have means and opportunity and yet make so little of ourselves. If poor boys and girls become great, rich ones ought to become greater. God expects us to do and become according to what we can.

God's call to Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt came in a surprising way. He was tending his sheep one day when he noticed a sight that astonished him. It was a little bush, from the midst of which fire flamed forth, and although it seemed to be burning it did not burn up. Moses was so struck by the sight that he naturally drew



near to see what it was. He did not even suspect that God was near at hand about to speak to him of things of the greatest importance. Moses reminds us here of Jacob. You will find the story to which I refer in Genesis, chapter xxviii. It is one of the grandest stories in the Bible or any other book. Jacob lay down on the road-side to sleep one night when he had the grand dream of angels going up and down between earth and heaven on a ladder. When he awoke in the morning he exclaimed: Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not! So it was with Moses when he faced the burning bush. He did not know that God was thus showing Himself and was about to speak to him. Too many of us are like Jacob and Moses. We rarely think that God is near and may have some message of importance for us. But there is not one of us to whom He does not speak at some time or even often. We do not hear Him. Of course not. We think that God no longer speaks to us, we appear to think that He is dumb. The truth is, as the poet Lowell has said:

“God is not dumb, that He should speak no more;  
If thou hast wanderings in the wilderness  
And findest not Sinai, 'tis thy soul is poor;  
There towers the mountain of the Voice no less,  
Which whoso seeks shall find; but he who bends,  
Intent on manna still and mortal ends,  
Sees it not, neither hears its thundered lore.”

The fault is in us if we do not hear or see God. We are not prepared, we do not expect Him, we do not look for Him. There is more beauty about us than any of us see. If we were only prepared to see better and hear more attentively than we do we too should, like Jacob, find ladders reaching from the ground to God, or, like Moses, hear God's voice sounding from any wayside bush. Moses was unlike us and greater than we are in

that he was always prepared to hear God speak. He always carried thought of God within him, and therefore easily found God outside. So, when Moses drew near to the bush to see what it was, God spoke to him, and he heard and understood. God called him by name, and he replied: Here am I. Then God continued: Come not too near. Put off thy sandals from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.

Put off thy sandals! What a strange command from God. What it means was, as we should say, take off thy hat and bow down in respect and reverence. When a man knows that he is before God he must in some way show it in his conduct. We must treat differently the things which are considered sacred from those which are not. It is for our own good.

God's other words to Moses will also seem strange to some. The place whereon thou standest is holy ground! How could that be holy? It was only a spot in the wilderness. Every place can be holy. Any place can be made profane. The place whereon Moses stood was holy because he was in presence of God; he stood, even though he didn't know it, before a great grand undertaking. Wherever we find God, wherever we worship him, wherever and whenever we think noble thoughts and attempt to do noble things, that time and place are holy.

God now said to Moses: I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. I have seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. The cry of the children of Israel is come unto me, and I have seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now, therefore, and I will send thee unto

Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Here was certainly a great surprise for a shepherd to be called so suddenly to the task of so great a leadership of men. It almost overwhelmed Moses. He straightway said to the Almighty: Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? There was no conceit in Moses. He was truly great and, therefore, considered himself insignificant, unimportant. Conceit is a mark of littleness. Only people who don't know think they do. Greatness is usually unpretentious, modest. The great man knows enough to be sure that he really knows very little.

God encouraged Moses. He told him that He would be with him. Moses again objected that the Israelites themselves would pay no heed to him, would have no confidence in him. God removed this objection. He told Moses that he would enable him to do some wonderful things before the people to convince them that God had really sent him. And still Moses felt uncertain as to whether he was fit to go. He pleaded now that he was no speaker. O my Lord, he said, I am not eloquent, I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. To this the Lord said: Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, the deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord? Now, therefore, go, and I will teach thee what thou shalt say. God is the source whence come our duties, from Him also comes all power. If we feel or know that a duty rests upon us it is ours to do and not to question. We needn't bother about our ability to do things. God knows better than we what we can or cannot do. All that we are expected to do is to try. It is our intention that counts with God. God considers this while man thinks only of our success or failure. In God's sight it is not sinful and disgraceful to fail. It is sinful not to try. Moses didn't appear to have thought of this.



Or he greatly underrated his powers. He was too modest. It is bad to think too much of self, but it is worse to think too little. Conceit will at least try. Too great modesty will often attempt nothing. So Moses said to the Almighty: O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send.

Moses had gone too far. This last refusal was too much for the Almighty's patience. How patient and persistent God had been with him! like a father towards his little child trying to persuade him to do the right, but God, like the earthly parent, is compelled sometimes to become angry at us and even punish us. He punishes us because he loves us, as we are taught in Proverbs (Ch. iii, 12): Whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. God became angry at Moses for his continued refusal to go to Egypt and undertake Israel's leadership. But God's anger is short-lived while His love is uninterrupted and unending. His love is like the great deep ocean; His anger is like the ocean's tiny ripples. So, although He became angry at Moses it was only for a moment. He straightway said: Aaron thy brother shall go with thee. Tell him what thou hast to say. He shall be thy spokesman, and I will be with him and with thee.

Moses was now content to go. He went back to Jethro, his father-in-law, and told him that he must give up his position as shepherd to return to Egypt on behalf of his brethren. Jethro saw at once the sacredness of his duty and said to Moses: Go in peace.

Jethro did well to accompany Moses' parting with a prayerful greeting of peace. He was about to fulfill a divine mission. He was turning his back upon a lowly leadership of sheep to become one of the world's loftiest leaders of men. To all who enter upon such noble tasks we may well echo Jethro's words: Go in peace. People of peaceful purpose will surely attain to peace.

#### IV. THE EXODUS

Moses and Aaron appointed by God to be Israel's liberators set out upon the performance of their divine duty. It was to be a difficult task. God warned Moses of this. He told him that Pharaoh would not readily give in. There were several reasons for this. In the first place it would be a great loss to Pharaoh to lose a people whose labor he had enjoyed free. In the second place Pharaoh would not readily consent because he could not. God would not let him. God said to Moses: I will harden the heart of Pharaoh so that he shall not let the people go. This seems very strange. Some even say that it is childish. It is childish, they say, to tell Pharaoh to let the people go and then prevent him from doing so by hardening his heart. There are many things which seem senseless to us which are wise and good when understood. So it was with the hardening of Pharaoh's heart by God. Pharaoh had been guilty and the people of Egypt had been guilty also for a long time in keeping Israel in bondage. Bondage is wrong. They who inflict it know that it is wrong. And still Pharaoh and his people allowed the wrong to continue. Now whenever wrong is done it has to be punished. Punishment may not come at once, but it cannot be escaped in one form or another.

God is in the world. No deed is unnoticed or remains without consequence. The longer punishment delays the worse it becomes. The longer we do wrong the harder it is for us to give up and the greater at last is the penalty. This is what we find in Pharaoh's case. He had done wrong for a long time. His punishment continued to accumulate. At last when he felt that he ought to give up he could not. God had hardened his heart! He

would have to suffer first to undo all that he had done. As he and his people had caused others to suffer and to sorrow, so now they would have to balance the account by suffering and sorrowing themselves. We thus see that sin is at the start like a tiny thread that we wind about ourselves. If we continue to wind we shall find in time that the frail binding which might at first have easily been broken has become as strong, as burdensome, as difficult to remove as a cable. Let us beware of the first short sinful step. Let us avoid as we would a pest the first little wrongful deed. Pharaoh and his people hadn't done so and this was why the work of the liberation became so difficult for Moses and his brother Aaron.

They went to Pharaoh and said: Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, let my people go that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness. This meant that Israel were to serve God and not Pharaoh. Pharaoh was very much surprised at this request. Who is the Lord, said he, that I should obey His voice and let Israel go? He became indignant. He regarded the request of Moses and Aaron as very bold. He was looked upon in Egypt as a god. He recognized no other God. Moses and Aaron tried to explain to him, but it did no good. It only increased his anger. He accused them of interfering with the work of the people which would be a loss to him. He even commanded the taskmasters to give the slaves more work to do. They are lazy, he said. Their desire to worship is only an excuse to get out of doing their duty. So he ordered that the workmen should gather their own straw for making brick, but should still make as many day by day as before. This of course made the lot of the Israelites harder and sadder than ever. But the eye of the Almighty was upon them. His heart beat with pity for them. Pharaoh was great, but He was greater. In due time and in the proper way He would end their misery and punish their oppressors.

The Israelites complained piteously to Moses of their



increased suffering. God heard this and sent them this message of encouragement: I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians. I will rid you of their bondage. I will redeem you with a stretched-out arm and with great judgments. I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God. I will take you unto a good land and give it to you for a possession. The Israelites did not receive this message with cheer, they paid no attention to it. Their suffering had robbed them of all hope. They did not believe Moses when he told them. Still God went on with His plan of deliverance. He does not altogether guide Himself by what we do or believe, but chiefly by His great unending patience and unlimited love.

God had given Pharaoh and the Egyptians ample notice and opportunity to send Israel away, but they refused and continued their cruel oppression. He resolved to force Israel's liberation, but first to compel Egypt to suffer for its un pitying cruelty. He brought this about by inflicting upon the Egyptians, their country and their possessions, ten plagues which increased in severity step by step until at last they were compelled to give up in death their first-born, both of men and of animals.

These are the plagues which the Egyptians were compelled to suffer:

1. All the waters of Egypt, in streams, rivers, pools, and ponds were turned to blood. Fish died and caused a horrible odor. The water was thus made unfit to drink, and the Egyptians were compelled to dig wells. Pharaoh was not afflicted by this so God sent the second plague.

2. Frogs came up from the rivers, ponds and streams, entered the palace of the king and the homes of the people, and filled everything and covered every place with their disgusting presence. They got into beds, into ovens, and even into the troughs where bread was made. Nothing was free from their nasty pollution. Pharaoh

was a little affected by this plague. He called for Moses and Aaron and asked them to petition God for relief. He was willing, he said to let the people go. God removed the frogs, but Pharaoh did not keep his promise and thus added to his wrong. God sent the third plague.

3. All the dust of Egypt wherever it was, on the earth, on beast, or on man, was turned to vermin. Pharaoh's magicians were frightened by this and told him that it was the finger of God giving warning, but his heart remained hard and he refused to give in. God then sent the fourth plague.

4. Flies came up over all Egypt, swarming densely everywhere and making life miserable for everybody, even for the king in his palace. The land of Goshen, neighboring Egypt, where the Israelites were, was untouched, so that the Egyptians could see that it was a punishment specially for them. Pharaoh was a little moved by this, for he expressed his willingness to allow the people to worship God in the land. Moses would not consent to this. He demanded that the people be allowed to leave the country. Pharaoh had to give in. The flies were removed, but he again broke his promise. God then brought on the fifth plague.

5. All the cattle of Egypt were stricken with a deadly disease. The cattle of Israel remained unharmed. And yet Pharaoh continued stubborn. God sent the next plague.

6. Boils broke out on man and beast throughout Egypt, ugly painful boils upon every one from the lowest to the king. Pharaoh's heart would still not soften. God commanded Moses to bring on another plague.

7. A fierce hail-storm came. Thunder crashed, fire ran along upon the earth, and hail poured down in great lumps. Bushes vegetables and trees were beaten down. Animals and human beings were killed. Only the Israelites and their possessions were protected. It was a frightful visitation. Pharaoh was affected. He sent

for Moses and Aaron, acknowledged that he had done wrong and begged for relief, promising to obey God's command. As soon as relief came his heart hardened again and his people were not released. The eighth plague was sent.

8. Locusts came and covered the entire country. The ground could nowhere be seen. They entered the houses and filled everything. They ate whatever they found fit for food. They consumed entirely every green thing in the fields that had not been destroyed by the hail. Pharaoh was frightened by this plague and sent hastily for Moses and Aaron to acknowledge his sinfulness and through them obtain relief. God is a forgiving Father. He readily meets and encourages the least desire of His children to do right. So He caused the locusts to go away. But Pharaoh was a fickle being. His intention to do right did not last. As soon as the locusts were removed his heart hardened again and refused to let Israel go. He had to be punished again. This brought on the ninth plague.

9. Dense darkness came over the country. For three days and nights men could not see each other. The darkness was such that even a light would have been useless. Such a punishment was as bad as being in a dungeon. People couldn't move about. They couldn't do anything. Pharaoh was inclined to give in a little when this plague came. He was willing for the older people of Israel and the children to go, but he wished to keep the cattle. He didn't know that God will make no concessions to wrong-doing. He will not allow us to do little wrongs if we give up greater ones. So Pharaoh had to be punished once more. God had been patient long enough. He determined now to bring a plague that would certainly soften Pharaoh's heart and punish him sufficiently for his guilt. God knew in His far-reaching knowledge that Pharaoh would give in this time, so He commanded the Israelites to prepare for their going.





THE DEATH OF PHARAOH'S FIRST BORN

He told them to ask presents of gold and silver from their neighbors. They were entitled to it. They had slaved long for nothing. And they got what they asked for. It seems that God touched the hearts of the Egyptians to generosity. God also commanded that every Israelite should slay a lamb on the fourteenth day of the first Jewish month called Nissan and sprinkle its blood upon the door-posts of their homes. God intended to send a destructive plague upon Egypt which would pass over the homes of Israel marked with blood. He also commanded them to celebrate at this time year by year their deliverance. They were to observe the festival for seven days. In that time they were to eat unleavened bread and nothing that was leavened or, as we should say, fermented. All preparations were completed. God now sent the tenth and last plague.

10. At midnight death came into the homes of the Egyptians. It was death in one of its most terrible forms. It took away the first born in every household, whether it was the poorest or in the palace. Pharaoh and his people had long disregarded the sighs, the suffering, the death of poor enslaved Israel, now they had to pay the penalty, measure for measure, in their own suffering and tears. There was not an Egyptian home where there was not one dead. Not a single house in Israel suffered. They had suffered long enough. Their day of rejoicing had come.

Pharaoh was at last moved to pity. He was now compelled to do what he had refused to do willingly. He learned to his sorrow as many of us have to do that we may put God off for a long time in neglecting our duty, but at last we shall learn, and the longer we wait the harder the lesson, that God's will and not ours must prevail. When Pharaoh found this out he rushed even by night to find Moses and Aaron, to have the Israelites depart. He urged them to go, to go quickly, and take with them whatever they wished. He even asked them

to pray for him also. What a pitiable object he was! He had been a haughty monarch, he was now a cringing suppliant begging a favor of his former slaves. This is a moral world. God is in it. Let us but wait and be patient. False pride and tyranny will tumble, humility and uprightness will be crowned.

So the Israelites were driven out. Egypt was glad to see them go. So hurried was their departure that they had to bake on their journey dough which they couldn't bake into bread at home. It was to be a reminder of this that God commanded the use of unleavened bread year by year. It was to be a symbol of Israel's suffering and redemption. It is still used by the Jews of the world to-day during Passover. It is an object lesson to them teaching that in prosperity they must not forget that things were not always thus, but that they owe much to heavenly Providence. The Jews have other beautiful home customs in connection with Passover. On the first and second evenings there is a solemn Passover service and meal called Seder, which is an impressive lesson to all who participate, of Israel's painful past and God's ever present protection.

So Israel's exodus had come. God had freed the slave. A new Jewish festival was thereby created. Freedom was hence to be regarded as sacred. For the first time in recorded history the warning finger of God had shown that all men are God's children, that no man dare take away or impose upon the rightful liberty of another man. For this great lesson, this great gain to human happiness, God be praised!



## V. FROM SLAVERY TO SONG

When the Israelites were freed from their bondage God led them towards what has been called the Promised Land. It was the land of Canaan or Palestine. God had promised it again and again to the forefathers of Israel, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as a lasting possession for them and their descendants. The whole earth is God's, as the Bible teaches (Exodus xix, 5), so He gave to Israel Palestine where they were to settle and begin their divine duty of protecting God's teaching for the rest of the world. God is faithful to fulfill His promises. So now after Israel's liberation from Egypt He began to lead them to the promised land.

We are taught and can easily see that the shortest distance between two places is a straight way. And yet we find that when God began Israel's journey He did not lead them straight into the land He had promised. The Bible tells us (Exodus xiii, 17-18) that He led them roundabout through a wilderness. This seems strange to us. I have no doubt that it also struck the Israelites with amazement. They had just come from the rigors of Egypt and now were to suffer the trials and dangers of a wilderness when they might have marched directly to the land of their destination. They probably thought that they had gained nothing by their liberation. Of course they were better off even in the wilderness, though it was harder than they had been used to in Egypt. There they had been slaves; now they were free. Hardship is not so bad when one is free. It is far worse to suffer and be a slave too. But the Israelites were not sufficiently refined to see this. Their many years of slave-life had dulled and almost crushed their finer feelings. We find proof of this a little later in their



THE ISRAELITES ON THE MARCH



journeying (Exodus, xiv, 12). They were faced by a terrible danger and rebuked Moses for taking them out of Egypt. It had been better for us, they said, to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness. No true man would talk thus. He would rather die in the wilderness as a free man than live in Egypt as a slave. The fact that the Israelites felt as they did and were not more refined is the reason why God led them through the wilderness. The journey through the wilderness was to educate and make better men of them. They were not fit now to take possession of a new country and begin a new nation. God in His great wisdom knew this. He was simply doing for the Israelites what was best for them, even though they did not know it, even though they probably thought that He was treating them cruelly.

Many of us are often like the Israelites. We have trials and troubles. Misfortunes come that seem greater than we deserve and so harsh that they lead us to wonder whether God is really good. Whenever such thoughts enter our minds we ought to think of the treatment we receive sometimes from our father or mother. We are often compelled to do things, to study lessons, to practice music; we must even receive punishment from them. At the time we cannot see the sense of it. We even think that they are unkind or cruel. When we become older and more sensible we understand that they only did what they did because of their love and desire to benefit us. So it is with God, our Heavenly Parent. Many of the severe trials we are compelled to suffer in life are His way of educating us to become better men and women. God led Israel through the wilderness because they would be the better for it.

A little thought would have shown the Israelites that they had no reason to worry or complain. The Bible tells us (Exodus, xiii, 21) that God led them on their journey, pointing out the way they should go by sending as a



guide before them a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. If the Israelites had considered this wonderful instance of God's protection they would have found reason to trust that as well as God was certainly helping them that much He would probably help them further. Poor unfortunate Israelites! They were to be pitied more than blamed. They were what their past had made them. They show us how degrading and terrible slavery is. No wonder that God had them freed. No wonder that He treated them with such patience and pity even when they acted crossly and ungratefully. Our heavenly Father understands.

The Israelites proceeded to the Red Sea where God had instructed them to encamp. We shall soon see another reason why He led them the way they went. I have told you that He wished to educate and prepare them to be citizens of their new country. We shall now see that He also wanted to punish Egypt further. They had not been sufficiently punished, it seems. You can see from this how much God despises the cruelty of slavery. He again hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and this led him to regret the sending away of the Israelites and to attempt to bring them back to slavery again.

Accordingly Pharaoh and his army with their best chariots of war set out to capture fleeing Israel. They overtook them at their camping-place by the sea.

When Israel saw Pharaoh and his host coming they were terror-stricken and cried out bitterly to God. Even though God had already protected them most wondrously, they were thrown into despair when this latest danger arose. They blamed and scolded Moses whom God appointed as their leader, and asked him sarcastically whether he thought that there was no room to bury them in Egypt that he brought them to die where they were. It was here that they said, as I have already told you, that they would rather have remained as slaves in Egypt than die in the wilderness. Moses listened calmly

to their complaint. He felt deeply for them. Great man that he was he understood why they acted as they did. Besides, God had told him what fate was in store for the Egyptians. So he calmly said to the Israelites: Do not fear, stand still, and see what God will do for you to-day. The Egyptians whom you see now you shall never see again. God will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace. Then Moses cried to God for assistance and God said to him: Why dost thou cry unto me? It was not a time for prayer and crying. It was a time to be up and doing. So God said to Moses: Say to the Israelites that they should go forward. Do thou lift up thy rod and stretch out thy hand over the sea and divide it. The Israelites shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. God would thus protect Israel again and punish their unyielding foes. Before this great wonder was done God further placed His protection around Israel by placing between them and their pursuers the cloud which had been a guide to Israel. Now it continued to be a source of light to Israel, but to the Egyptians it was a source of darkness so that they were kept from coming near enough to do any harm.

Moses now stretched forth his hand over the sea and God caused a strong wind to blow till the waters flowed backwards and left a passage of dry land in their midst. Over this passage the Israelites went while the water stood like walls at their right hand and at their left.

In spite of the wonder of this great deed for Israel, showing that they were specially protected by God, the Egyptians rushed on after them without a moment's thought or hesitation. They had not yet been humbled. They had not yet learned that it is one of the most dangerous things of human life to disregard or try to set aside God's will. The lesson was now to be learnt by them, but too late, because they were to learn at the cost of their lives. Still those who came after them were probably made wiser by it.

When the Egyptians had reached the midst of the sea God sent confusion among them. Their chariot wheels came off or stuck in the sand. The Israelites meanwhile reached the opposite shore safely. When the Egyptians saw this and realized their dangerous predicament they determined to go back. Let us flee, they said, for the Lord fighteth for Israel against the Egyptians. But it was too late to go back. Divine Mercy had been patient with them long enough. They had been given ample opportunity and warning to cease doing evil, but they paid no heed. At last God could not do otherwise than punish them severely. So he said unto Moses: Stretch forth thine hand over the sea, that the water may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. Moses did as God ordered. The sea began to rush back to its former condition. When the Egyptians saw this they started to flee for their lives. They tried to escape God's punishment. In vain. You cannot get away from the penalty of your wrong-doing which God the All-Knowing and Just imposes upon you. Men have tried to do so again and again, but unsuccessfully. We may postpone punishment for a while but we cannot escape it unless we give up doing wrong. So the Egyptians were engulfed in the waters of the sea. They and their splendid horses and chariots sank like a stone to the deep. They had once tried to put an end to Israel by destroying Israel's sons in water; now they found a watery grave through that very Israel whom they had sought to destroy. This is indeed a moral world. God is above us. Everything is balanced in due time. Let us not be impatient at successful wickedness and suffering virtue. God knows best when to act. Let us close our lips in humility and wait.

The Israelites were safe on dry land. God had promised to protect them and did so. Even when they least expected aid it came. One moment they were in the terror of threatened destruction, without any possibility



of escape that they could see or imagine. The next moment they were joyously singing of their wondrous salvation. As soon as the Israelites realized their safety they naturally broke forth in grateful song. You know that we generally sing when we are happy. I shall give you parts of their song. You will find all of it in Exodus, chapter fifteen. It is very beautiful.

I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.

The Lord is my strength and my song, for He hath become my salvation. He is my God and I will glorify Him; the God of my father and I will exalt Him.

The Lord, master of battle, the Eternal is He.

Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath He cast into the sea; his choicest captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.

The depths have covered them: they sank into the deep as a stone.

Thy right hand, O Lord, is glorious in power: Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.

In the greatness of Thy sublimity Thou hast overthrown those that rose up against Thee: Thou sentest forth Thy wrath, it consumed them like stubble.

By the blast of Thy nostrils were the waters gathered together; they stood upright in a heap: they became hardened in the heart of the sea.

The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, I will glut my appetite upon them, I will draw my sword and get possession of them.

But Thou didst blow with Thy wind, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead into the mighty waters.

Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the mighty? who is like unto Thee, sublime in holiness, awful in praises, and doing wonders?

Thou didst stretch forth Thy right hand, and the earth swallowed them.

Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth this people which

Thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in Thy strength to Thy holy dwelling place.

Nations will hear of it and tremble.

The Lord shall reign forever and ever.

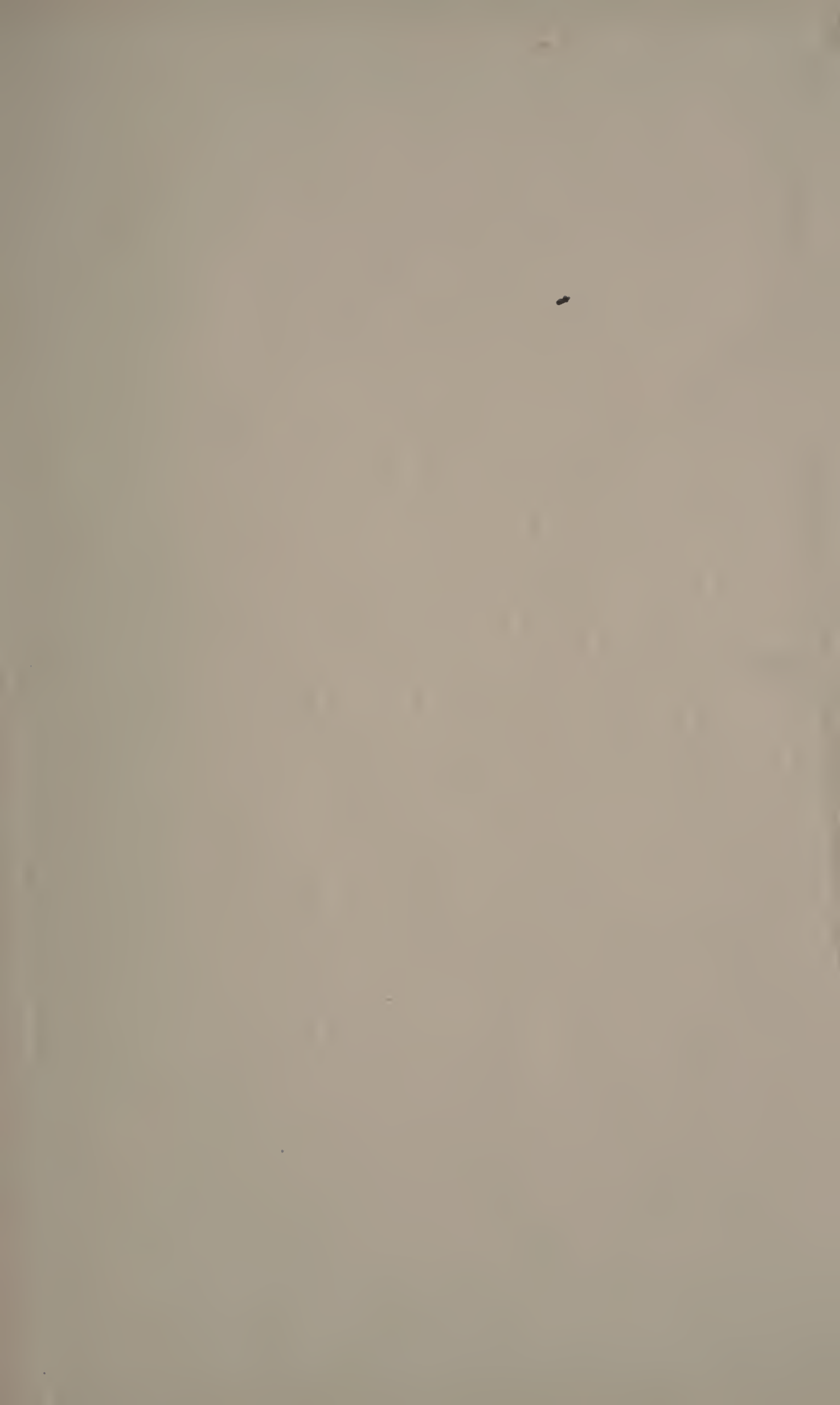
The horse of Pharaoh with his chariots and horsemen went into the sea, and the Lord brought the waters of the sea upon them, but the Israelites went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

This is a beautiful song. It is a grand song of triumph. There is none more inspiring. It is a song at the grave of a pitiless enemy but not a song of gladness at his destruction. It is a song of praise and thanksgiving for liberty and safety. It was a beautiful and appropriate close to a long history of slavery and suffering. It reminds us of what the Psalmist teaches (Psalm cxxvi, 5) that: They that sow in tears shall reap in gladness. Israel had sown in tears in many years of bondage. They were now beginning to reap the fruit of liberty in song and smiles. They learned what each of us must learn, that, as the Psalmist says (Psalm xxx, 6): Weeping may lodge with us over night, but joy cometh in the morning. The world we live in is moral. God is over it, and God is good. Goodness and gladness will ultimately succeed. Time will turn slavery into song.









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